

CIA Today:

Back on Its Feet

FOR all the publicity given the nuclear threat and the Pentagon's multimillion-dollar weapons systems, the fact remains that in recent years Western civilization has been undermined by something about as far removed from nuclear war as it's possible to get: guerrilla terrorism funded through international networks.

Thus one of the most important accomplishments of the Reagan years has been the strengthening of the Central Intelligence Agency, which had been rendered virtually impotent during the Carter administration. The number of CIA agents fell dramatically, and its power to maneuver was severely restricted by congressional guidelines.

No doubt the CIA has occasionally been heavy-handed and bungling to the point of being counterproductive — the same could be said of most federal agencies. Seldom, though, has that moved Congress to restrict other agencies as it has the CIA. During the 1970s, when the rest of the federal bureaucracy was bloating to record dimensions and a strong CIA was needed more than ever, President Carter and congressional doves decimated the agency.

Consider the example of Iran. By the time of the overthrow of the shah of Iran in 1979, the CIA was so weak that it was hardly able to predict events, let alone influence them. By the time of Carter's failed mission to rescue the American

hostages seized by pro-Khomeini fanatics, the CIA had been completely run out of the country.

Reagan, then, has rightly made rebuilding the CIA a top priority. Under Reagan the agency's budget has grown each year by a greater percentage than the Pentagon budget has grown.

Among Director William Casey's top priorities has been to stop Soviet pilfering of American high technology, though by now KGB infiltration in this area is massive. According to a recent estimate by the Institute on Strategic Trade, the \$50 million the Soviets have spent over the last decade to steal U.S. high technology has saved them research-and-development costs of \$100 billion.

Consider just a couple of focal points of East-West conflict abroad: Nicaragua and Afghanistan. In the former, it's simply unrealistic to think the Marxist Sandinistas would be moderating their stance — at least rhetorically — in the absence of CIA pressure. And it's an ill-kept secret that much of the paltry aid the Afghan freedom fighters get would never reach them without CIA efforts.

It will take a long time to undo the damage of the 1970s, but at least the effort is under way. Without that effort, the free world would be far more vulnerable than it already is to terrorists and totalitarians who, like it or not, can't be thwarted by the processes of parliamentary debate or international law.